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Sec. 4.01.2 Message  
From Moscow

## A BOOK FOR TODAY

**Mysterious 'Observer' on USSR**

By HENRY S. BRADSHER

MESSAGE FROM MOSCOW.  
By an Observer. Alfred A.  
Knopf. 288 pages. \$5.95.

Books about the Soviet Union which avoid detailed analysis and try to remain on a popular level tend to fall into two categories.

There are the rosy views, sometimes based on a political predisposition to ignore awkward facts and sometimes based on the ignorance acquired by an Intourist or otherwise conducted tour of the country. Lately we have had more of the latter type of rosi-ness because of the increasing numbers of persons who visit the Soviet Union without ever knowing how little they see and how distorted are the things they hear.

Then there are the tough, harsh books that focus on the things which are wrong. They often get dismissed as too bitterly anti-Communist to be fair. Surely, the open-minded reader will wonder, things can't be that bad. But it is doubtful that many open-minded readers get around to them; such books are for dedicated haters, and others have a weakness for the rosi-ness-through-ignorance type.

Now we have a book from someone whom the publisher calls "a Russian-speaking, Russia-loving non-Communist Westerner who has chosen to remain anonymous to avoid reprisals against the Soviet intellectuals and workers who have taken him into their homes and into their confi-

dence." This sounds like category No. 2.

And yet it isn't, and because it isn't this book deserves a wide, open-minded audience.

Written in bitterness over the Soviet public's almost total apathy to their nation's invasion of Czechoslovakia to crush freedom, the book is nonetheless an impressively realistic report on some aspects of life in Moscow and Leningrad today.

This reviewer was a correspondent in Moscow for more years than the author says he lived there as a student, and several were overlapping years. The descriptions, the atmosphere, the feelings ring true.

He criticizes Western correspondents for paying too much attention to the one percent of the Soviet population who might qualify as intellectuals, for being too isolated from the real people, and it is valid criticism. But it might be asked whether the author, too, concentrates too much on dissident intellectuals.

As a student he was involved with them. He tells spy thriller-type stories of dissident efforts to avoid secret police surveillance, but he also tells of the success which the police have had in destroying any organized dissent. The ruined careers because of protests against the suffocating system and the prostituting of dissidents into informers are described.

Observer is horrified by the whole drift back toward Stalinism in a modernized, somewhat sanitized, but still brutal form. He cites examples that Western experts had not heard before, examples that might well have been heard by a student but escaped a more isolated journalist or diplomat in Moscow.

One is a story, important for the atmosphere it evokes whether true or not (and it is hard to believe it is true), that he heard in Leningrad. Leonid I. Brezhnev, the general secre-

tary of the Soviet Communist party and therefore the most powerful single individual in the country, was to speak publicly. Two 17-year-old boys were caught with crude bombs. The speech was turned into a kangaroo court with Brezhnev presiding and the boys were publicly executed two hours later.

Observer touches on many things: the pervasive cheating of the boss which means the government which means nobody so it's really all right, the village atmosphere of the cities, the failure of anyone to care about working hard or even working at all, the narrow-mindedness of those who rise to the top of the stultifying system, the sexual laxity behind the facade of Victorian puritanism.

And he paints some memorable portraits, particularly that of Nadezhda Nikolaevna, a massive peasant woman driving a Moscow taxi through a midnight snowstorm. There is human warmth in the book.

"I confess," the author notes after one particularly depressing passage, "that I can no longer strike a proper balance between what is good and what bad in the Communist party and Soviet system; between the great progress and the terrible cost. It seems that the Communists have delivered Russia from one kind of backwardness only to plunge her into another."

One question remains: Who is the author?

Is he really a scholarship student, apparently from Western Europe, who just wanted to tell what he saw and perhaps make a little money doing it? Or is there something more devious here, perhaps a book cooked up in the West to discredit the Soviet Union from behind a guise of honesty?

It takes a suspicious mind to ask the question. But the recent history of revelations published by the two super-powers about each other is one of clever counter-propaganda plants. This book is a bit too incisive, a bit too good to leave the question unasked.